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CARE OF RABBITS DURING WARM WEATHER

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Hutch-raised rabbits require special attention during warm weather to prevent suffering and losses. In the wild state they are able to take care of themselves, and even when temperatures are high they "air condition" their living quarters by burrowing deep enough into the ground for the moisture and heat to be just right for their comfort. The successful breeder will anticipate the needs of his stock and prepare for warm weather, as the first few hot days are most trying on the animals.

Rabbits should be supplied with plenty of fresh water in summer, a season when they consume large quantities. A 10- to 12-pound doe and her 8-weeks-old litter of seven will drink about 1 gallon in 24 hours.

New-born litters and does well-advanced in pregnancy are most susceptible to the injurious effects of high temperatures. Heat suffering is characterized by extreme restlessness in young rabbits, and in the older animals by rapid respiration, excessive moisture, and, occasionally, slight hemorrhages around the nostrils. Rabbits that show symptoms of suffering from the heat can be relieved by being removed to a quiet, well-ventilated place. They should be given a feed sack moistened with cold water to lie on. Water should not be placed on their bodies, for wet fur is a predisposing factor for colds and pneumonia.

In small rabbitries, feed sacks placed on the floor or hung on the sides of hutches and wet down once or twice a day will give the animals considerable relief in hot weather. On large commercial farms, placing wet feed sacks in the hutches would become too much of a chore, so sprinkler systems may be used to lower the temperature. In well-ventilated rabbitries, wetting the tops of the hutches and the floor of the houses will reduce the temperature 6° to 10° F. on a hot day. The tops of the hutches must be waterproof, for the rabbits must be kept dry. Overhead equipment can be installed in houses with concrete or soil floors that drain readily. Such a system, with sprinkler heads of the lawn type,

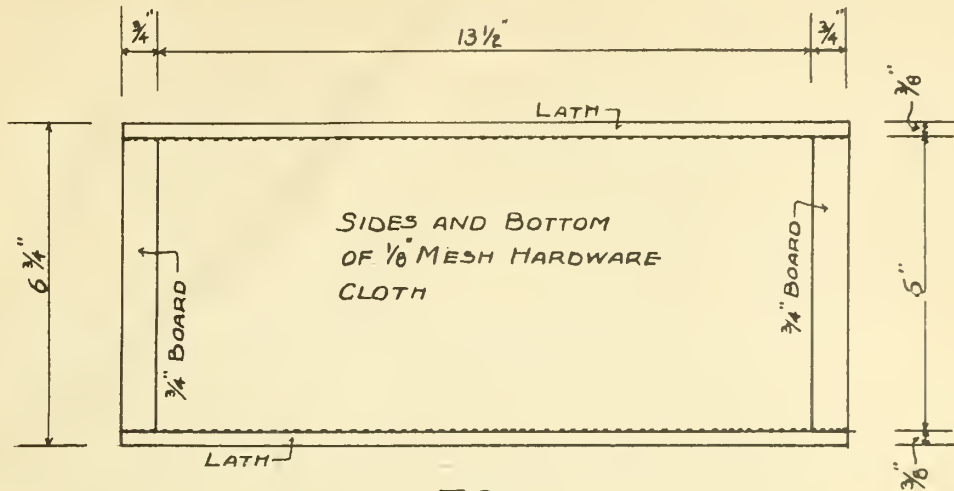
has been employed at the United States Rabbit Experiment Station, Fontana, Calif., where the maximum night temperature during the hot season averages about 30 degrees below that of the day.

During the summer it is difficult to regulate the quantity of fur in the nest boxes so that the litter can be made comfortable and losses prevented. The young, becoming restless, often make their way out of the boxes and either die from the heat or are injured by being caught in the floor of the hutch. A cooling basket for them has been designed at the Experiment Station. This provides comfort during the hot weather, from the time the young are kindled until their eyes are open and they are able to look out for themselves.

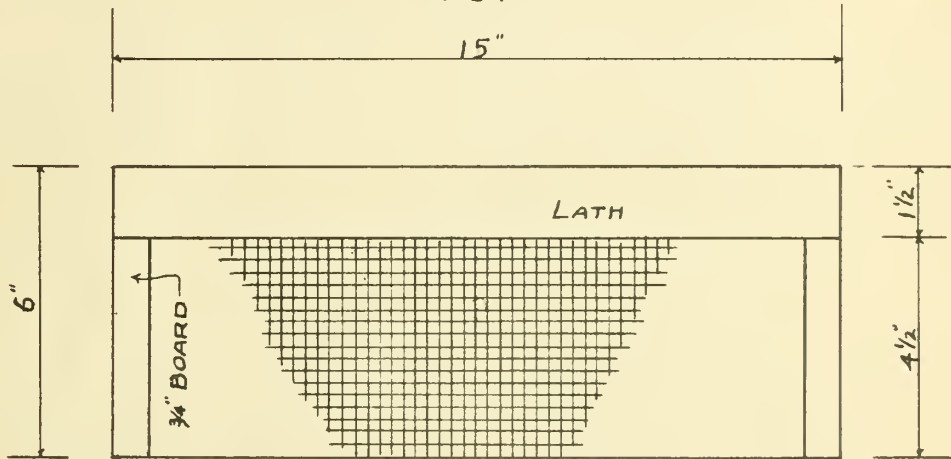
The cooling basket, which should be 15 inches long, 6 inches wide, and 6 inches deep, is inexpensive, simple of design, and easy to construct. All that is needed to make one is a piece of 1/8-inch-mesh hardware cloth 15 inches long and 18 inches wide; two 3/4-inch boards 6 inches square; and two laths 15 inches long, 1-1/2 inches wide, and 3/8 inch thick. Tack the hardware cloth to the sides and bottom of the two square boards. The wire cloth serves as the front, bottom, and back of the basket, while the boards form the ends. To prevent bending, nail the two laths lengthwise, in front and back of the basket, outside the wire, to the sides of the end boards. The top edges of the laths should be flush with the tops of the boards. At the back, insert two screw hooks in the end boards about 2 inches from the top so that the basket can be hung up (see illustration).

When the temperature is high enough to make the young restless, they should be placed in the basket, which is hung up near the top on the inside of the hutch and left for the day. In the evening, when the heat has moderated, the litter is returned to the nest box. In sections where high temperatures continue throughout the night, the young must be placed in the nest box for a short time in the evening for nursing. They then should be replaced in the basket for the night and allowed to nurse again in the morning.

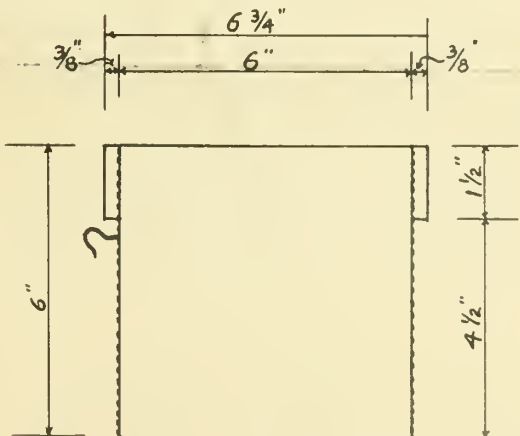
Does do not object to the litter being kept in these baskets, and the young rabbits are comfortable. For new-born animals it is advisable to put a little fur from the nest box into the bottom of the basket for the first 2 or 3 days, after which the practice should be discontinued.



TOP



FRONT



END

MATERIAL LIST

- 2 - 6 3/4" x 3/4" BOARD
- 2 - LATH - 15" LONG
- 1 - 1/8" MESH HARDWARE CLOTH
15" x 10"
- 18 TACKS
- 8 LATH NAILS
- 2 SCREW HOOKS

